DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 150 592 CS 203 902

AUTHOR	Gee, Tom
TITLE	Creative Writing in High School.
PUB DATE	76
NOTE	27p.; Not available in hard copy due to marginal legibility of original document
EDRS PRICE	MF-$0.83 Plus Postage. HC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS	*Creative Writing; Directories; *English Instruction; *Periodicals; Secondary Education; Student Participation; *Teaching Techniques
IDENTIFIERS	*Professional Journals

ABSTRACT

Designed to help high school teachers improve their creative writing courses, this document stresses the value of submitting students' work to professional publications. Separate sections examine general rules for teaching creative writing, present background information on creativity, discuss benefits and problems involved in submitting students' work for publication, and list possible outlets for student writing. Also included are a discussion of a junior high school creative writing program, with examples of student writing, and a presentation of three stories by high school students both originally published in "Alberta English." (GW)

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CREATIVE WRITING
IN
HIGH SCHOOL

A Workshop Package

prepared by

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1976

CS 203 902

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CREATIVE WRITING IN THE HIGH SCHOOL

A. Teaching Writing

Many teachers do not teach writing; they assign topics, mark the faulty mechanics of the submission, and sometimes the content, and return the assignment bearing a naked letter grade. As a result, students do not know what strengths their writing possesses; or where, excepting mechanics, they might improve on weaknesses. Usually, the writing ability of students improves anyway, fooling the teacher into believing he or she has been instrumental in this development when in reality it has been simply a manifestation of maturation rather than anything consciously achieved by teacher and students.

How, then, should writing be taught? *The first and cardinal rule is that students write about what they know and are interested in.* This is sometimes difficult though not impossible to achieve in essay writing. It is much easier to achieve using the short story form. Since improved writing, and not the form, is the goal, the short story, then, offers the recommended route. University-bound students must expect to learn how to handle the essay form as well. But even here, they should attach their topic to experience and interest as much as possible. And the mechanics of form are easily mastered once students have the content of their writing under control.

If it is accepted that students write from experience, the second rule is that teachers cannot assign topics. They can only suggest general areas where students might look for topics. For instance, students can always look back to when they were younger. What *incidents* occurred in their past that are interesting; what *characters* were involved; and what was the *setting?* These are the basic elements of a short story -- *thematic* stories should be encouraged only after more fundamental elements are mastered -- and the students already possesses them. It is just a matter of getting them on paper in story form then.

The third rule for writing teachers is that they encourage as much discussion on the subject as possible before students begin the actual writing on their first draft. For example, on looking at the past, a teacher of English 20 might read the excerpt from Wallace Stegner's Wolfwillow entitled "The Dump Ground" found in Buxton's Prose For Discussion. To encourage students to reflect on their experiences at the dump, the teacher might first describe his own. An hour might be spent entertaining student oral reflections on their trips to the dump. Alternately, John Updike's story "A Sense Of Shelter" found in On Writing by Writers, edited by W. West and published by Ginn and Company, might be read to illustrate an incident set in a high school. Students would then be encouraged to discuss interesting incidents which have occurred in their school.

Only after much discussion, sometimes carried on for a week of classes depending on the interest and level of the class, do students begin to write. *Then, fourth, the teacher allows for in-class writing during which the teacher writes too.* Teaching by example is not a cliché here. The teacher can discuss

his story and the problems he's having with it, and solicit student aid. Not only does this become a vehicle for teacning, but it will usually set up a climate of mutual cooperation so that students will discuss problems they are having with their writing. This, in turn, leads to teaching to the students' needs, be they mechanical, rhetorical, syntactical, or whatever.

Fifth, the teacher does not evaluate the students' first drafts. These are read with an eye to content strength and weakness. The teacher then discusses, on a one-to-one basis, first of all the strengths of the story. Knowing these, the student will be encouraged to incorporate them in subsequent writing. And this knowledge also sugar-coats the pill when the weaknesses in content are discussed with suggestions on how they might be improved upon or eliminated. If faulty mechanics are a factor, they are dealt with at this time. If all students are having similar problems, now is the time for a class lesson to teach the correct method. Consideration of conflict, essential to a story's existence, might be examined; or point of view or tense might be discussed to show how changing them affects the writing. Common mechanical errors might be assessed here.

Sixth, the teacher returns the first draft with his comments written at the end. These should particularly reiterate the strengths of the story but also encourage elimination of weaknesses. This provides the student with a written comment to refer to if it is some time after the interview before he gets back to the writing.

The second draft, hopefully typed or in neatest handwriting, incorporating first-draft strengths and eliminating weaknesses as suggested by the teacher, may then be submitted for evaluation. At this point, the teacher's marking load is considerably reduced since much has already been corrected. The teacher may want to examine only one or two aspects, changing them with each assignment. Again, a paragraph should be written commending the strengths before pointing out weaknesses still remaining and adding a grade.

Teachers will immediately discover, as will students, that the composition grades have improved. Student attitudes towards writing are also likely to improve -- to the point where, frequently, students will want more than one draft assessed, submitting a second and sometimes a third draft before final evaluation. Each time, the teacher should look at encouraging and helping the student improve his writing, and not at marking it until it is finally submitted for that purpose.

Finally, the best student work should be displayed to as broad an audience as possible. The student should see that his written expression does not stop at the teacher, that the teacher is not the entire audience. To this end, student writing should be displayed on the classroom bulletin boards. It should be published in school newspapers and yearbooks, or in booklet form prepared by the class on a regular basis. What about a school creative writing journal? It should be submitted to the editor of the local newspaper, and sent to the local radio station. It should be entered in writing contests -- winning a cash prize not only motivates the student concerned, but its spill-over affects the class and frequently the entire school. It also gives the teacher a helluva lift.

ADDENDUM

1. To the third rule: Writing from experience provides setting, and/or characterizations, and/or plot, which removes much of the objection "I don't know what to write about!" as well as much of the "verisimilitude" artificiality of student work. They know the incident(s), character(s) and setting; it's just a matter of getting them down on paper and fictionalizing for improvements on the original.

2. To the fifth rule: Write, Assess, Rewrite (WAR)

   (a) No consideration can be given to ideas or a story's merits if they are not written down. Don't waste time trying to think out the details, just write it down as it comes, "rough recall."

   (b) The teacher looks at the rough draft for the following:

   - conflict: must be present
   - point of view: what effect if changed?
   - tense: what effect if changed? Is it consistent?
   - description: does it utilize all 5 senses?
     : does it utilize figures of speech (simile, metaphor) which enhance description?
   - characterization: are thoughts and feelings of characters revealed?
     ; will changing the point of view improve characterization, ie. limited omniscient as opposed to 1st person?
     : is the character revealed through author's description solely (3rd person) or do his actions and the thoughts and speech of others reveal his character as well - believability of characters?
   - sequence of incidents: would reorganization improve the story?

   (c) The teacher may also wish to consider:

   - mood (tone, atmosphere): how is it created? ⟶ connotation, the exact shade of meaning for effect.
   - tension/suspense ⟶ building to a climax, sequencing.
   - surprise endings
   - stream of consciousness technique
   - opening on final scene
   - irony/satire/humour
   - epistolary form
   - symbolism/allegory
   - interpretive or thematic stories

3. Process for teaching poetry writing.

   (a) Write from experience.

1) - teacher's discussion of experiences which "focus-in" on subjects.
These should be specific.
- teacher illustrates, with examples, what is meant by "focusing in" on specific emotions, a particular friend, a pet, a scene. Use of "The Leaf Not The Tree" Kit #3, Gage, may be helpful in this. Topics such as, "War", "Love", etc. are not only too broad and general, but student experience with them is usually vicarious, at best.
- teacher illustrates, with examples, the difference between lyric and narrative poetry. (Narrative poetry, a story in verse, demands conflict and many of the considerations discussed in short story writing.) Robert Service provides good material: "The Spell of the Yukon" is lyrical; "The Cremation of Sam McGee" is narrative.

2) student's discussion of experiences - teacher indicates appropriateness, acts as sounding board for ideas.

(b) Write, Assess, Rewrite

1) Student composes rough draft with some polishing
2) Student submits this for teacher reaction.
- appropriateness and focus of topic
- does it "sound" believable i.e. from experience; or is it artificial.
- use of rhyme - meaning may not be sacrified for rhyme - once a rhyme pattern is established it must be maintained; hence, unrhymed poetry is easier to write (good unrhymed poetry is another matter.)
- use of five senses in description.
- use of figures of speech - strive for comparisons which enhance meaning.
- use of literary devices, i.e. alliteration, imitative harmony, etc. which enhance meaning.

(c) Niceties:

1) striving for mood ⟶ connotation
2) patterning of lines -- try varying line lengths for visual effect.
3) rhythm - try varying line lengths for rhythmic effect.
4) try making slide/tape presentations with student-written poetry
5) try filmstrips with poetry superimposed or on accompanying tapes.
6) try a poetry anthology.

B. Background

Whenever a new course is proposed, motivation (surely an overworked word in education) must also be considered. Such was the case when high school students were finally allowed to elect some courses. Some talented senior students opted for Language 21 (Creative Writing); some junior students elected Creative Writing as an "academic option." In both cases, no course curriculum existed. Teachers were forced to "make it up as they went along," and they often lost their enthusiasm in the process. Language 21 frequently degenerated into just another language course in which the teacher dished out topics, harangued on style and technique, and red-inked the resulting faulty mechanics. And, as everyone knows, there is a special place in heaven for teachers of junior high options. Motivation for the teacher appears to be as vital a prerequisite to the success of a creative writing course as it is for the student.

Some years ago, I found myself facing the distasteful task of writing a Master's thesis. The year before, I had had considerable enjoyment teaching creative writing as an academic option to a mixed grade, seven to nine.[1] That was the first year for academic options for junior high in Alberta and we junior high teachers were at somewhat of a loss as to where to begin. My felt success no doubt influenced my choice of thesis topic and I was soon immersed in the throes of research. The following evidence about creativity and creative writing was revealed by source after source.

> Creativity was variously defined as:
> . . . an ability to relate things in experience not previously related thereby producing something new, exciting or satisfying (Fromm).
> . . . a capacity to find new and unexpected connections among things (Kubie).
> . . . the molding of experiences into new, different organizational patterns (Taylor).
> . . . the combining of past experiences into new patterns (Arnold).
> . . . making combinations that reveal to us unsuspected kinship between facts, long known, but wrongly believed to be strangers to one another (Poincaré).[2]

In all cases, the idea of creativity is that unexpected connections of disparate concepts or experiences are seen by the creator, and the resulting product is new and satisfying to him.

Not all kids have the ability to make such connections. The degree of creativity appears to be dependent upon two factors: (1) the disparity between the concepts or facts which are related; and (2) the number of facts or concepts which are available to the creator. This latter bears directly upon the "threshold" concept which states that creativity cannot occur in a vacuum; a critical amount of factual information is necessary. And a critical I.Q. is necessary to learn that factual information. It has been suggested that below an I.Q. of about 120, insufficient information is held for creative faculties to operate effectively. Hence, convergent and divergent modes of thinking are not independent of each other but interact, the latter dependent on the former, in creative achievement. Cropley reports:

> . . . Although levels of achievement are closely related to intelligence at lower I.Q. levels, once some critical I.Q. has been reached, the two qualities become more or less unrelated, so that increases in intelligence do not produce proportional increases in achievement. The idea is that some critical level of intelligence is "enough" and that, beyond that, differences in achievement are caused by factors other than I.Q.

In studies replicated by Cropley and Torrance, Yamamoto reported correlations of .31 between I.Q. and creativity for fifth graders whose I.Q.'s were all below 90 and correlations of .02 for subjects of I.Q.'s above 130. All concurred in suggesting that the threshold I.Q. is about 120.[3] It has further been suggested that those high I.Q. students who appear to be uncreative are, in fact, creative underachievers.[4]

And that is where the teacher comes in. Additional interesting research revealed that where teachers are knowledgeable about creativity, overachievement among the creative group of their students is significantly greater than for teachers who have little or no knowledge of creativity.[5] It has also been demonstrated that creative thinking can be inhibited by teachers whose main interest is in authority, logic and control and that students found to be highly creative initially have, by the time they reach the high school level, lost much of their creative ability.[6] (Or have subjugated it.)

> . . . If we were to identify children as gifted on the basis of intelligence tests, we would eliminate from consideration approximately 70% of the most creative. This percentage seems to hold fairly well no matter what measure of intelligence we use and no matter what educational level we study, from kindergarten through graduate school.

C. The Creative Student: Anecdotes

Well then, how does the Language Arts teacher recognize a creative individual? Aside from the fact he's got a healthy I.Q. enabling him to possess a wealth of factual knowledge, and an insatiable curiosity to insure he does, in fact, possess such lore, the creative student is probably a pain in the neck, especially to a severely goal-oriented, conformist teacher unaware of the characteristics of the creative personality. The creative student exhibits a high tolerance to ambiguity, chaos even, accepting complexities without anxiety or stress. He resists closure in problem-solving longer than the more convergent thinking student. He exhibits a willingness to take risks, a "have-a-go", playful, often humourous attitude in dealing with a problem. He is, however, impatient with minutiae and bored with memorizing and the discovery process when it deals with problems which do not immediately concern him.

Armed with this knowledge, could I recognize creative potential in my students? Back in the classroom the following year, I began putting into practice some of my convictions about creative writing. Consistent with the research I had encountered, I very seldom received excellent creative work

from low intelligence students. However, frequent gems did appear in the work of pupils who were not good students academically. Very often these students improved considerably in their regular English courses as they excelled in Creative Writing. This was especially true of students whose writing was good enough, when reworked and polished under guidance, to submit to creative writing contests or to publish in the media. Undoubtedly, there was a Hawthorne Effect at work here as well, but I cannot believe it accounted for all, or even a majority, of the improvement.

One young fellow in Grade Nine sold a poem for $25 to a major publisher for inclusion in a new series of elementary readers. The effect on that student's attitude toward his academic life was nothing short of phenomenal. By the end of the term, his Grade Nine Language Arts marks had risen from failing grades into the seventies. Here is his poem:

AN ALBERTA SCENE

I climbed
a hill
and looked out
upon the snowcoated valley
and the smaller
hills
I saw
the snowfall and
heard the wind
blow and walk waist-
deep in the fresh
clean snow
I watched
the pond as it froze
hard in the cold
and followed
the deer over the snowy
hills

Les Reynolds (Grade 9)

A Grade Eleven girl won $75 (third in Alberta) for a short story she submitted to the Canada Permanent Trust Award Stories, a student writing contest. She is now enrolled in Creative Writing at the University of British Columbia. Another girl has a short story, written last year, entered in this year's contest. Her average marks in the interim in her regular English classes have risen over fifteen per cent, placing her consistently near the top of her high school English class.

Several students have submitted their poetry to English and poetry journals, and to poetry contests, and eventually have had them published. The wait sometimes runs to months, but over that time anticipation and interest are high, and the students' courses have invariably benefited.

Of course, there are pitfalls. Last spring, I sent half a dozen student poems and two of my own into the CAA Alberta Poetry Contest. When the Alberta

Poetry Yearbook finally appeared, there were two poems in it by the students but no sign of my own. Since we all entered under pen-names and all in the adult categories, I could assume only that their poems were better than my own. Oh, ego!

Other disasters have occurred as well. Of the five publications of student work with which I have been involved, I don't think one was initially free of plagiarized submissions. I don't know whether it is the pressure I put on students to excel -- I never felt it was that great -- or the pressure they receive at home that causes some to cheat. One boy turned in the lyrics of an obscure Jethro Tull song, one he was sure I wouldn't recognize, and didn't, but another staff member did. This from a very creative student capable of doing as well legitimately. Perhaps some students pressure themselves beyond tolerance limits at times.

Possibly the most mortifying incident for a student in this connection occurred the day one of my Grade Nine class, after listening to a reading of the winning story in a national short story contest, for which the writer had accepted the $1,000 national first prize, informed me that he'd read the story in a book at home. Although the student didn't realize at the time what he was saying, I used the incident to discuss the consequences of plagiarism and the class decided that the contest organizers must be informed. One can only guess at the overwhelming trauma that prize acceptance must have caused the individual -- the pleasure of the teacher initially on receiving the story, the praise given before the peer group, the contest entry and the impossibility of backing out of an ever-tightening web of prevarication, and finally the revelation of fraud.

Many good things, however, have come of teaching creative writing to high school students. Possibly the best is witnessing the satisfaction of students who see themselves in print for the first time. In order to get more of my students into print than can be attained by working through journals alone, I have undertaken to publish several anthologies of their work. Two are still available from the Alberta English Council, ATA Barnett House, Edmonton: How Can A Song Be Blue, an anthology of student verse, and A Nickel's Worth Of Wishing, an anthology of senior student short stories.

D. Publishing Student Work

Since the need for motivating student creative writing all but disappears from the teacher's role as students see their work in print (and occasionally sell their work), the following list of possible outlets for student writing is offered. Not only does seeing his/her work in print or receiving some stipend for it motivate the particular student, it exerts some "spill-over" effect on other students who are themselves striving to write well and witness the success of a peer. Moreover, the teacher's attempts to have his/her students published removes the teacher from the role of "audience" to that of mentor.

In keeping with this new role, and to emphasize it, the teacher should write along with the students, attempting with them to get articles, short stories and poems into print, discussing with them personal successes and failures, and soliciting their criticism. Senior students particularly can be very perceptive and helpful. And they learn in the process.

The teacher of creative writing might like to have on hand a copy of Canadian Writers Guide prepared by the Canadian Authors Association (contact a branch near you), and a subscription to a magazine such as Canadian Author and Bookman (contact Mary Dawe, editor, 8726 - 116 Street Edmonton) or The Writer (check newstands). The Alberta Authors' Bulletin, available free on request from the Literary Arts Branch, Alberta Culture, 11th Floor CN Tower, Edmonton, provides stimulating ideas, market notes, comments and how-to's for fledgling and professional writers.

This list of ideas is not exclusive, of course, and each teacher should be on the lookout for other promising outlets. As well, teachers should not overlook school yearbooks and newspapers, local news media, and, most importantly, the publication of class, school or system-wide anthologies. Student anthologies are becoming more and more popular as outlets. They may be as simple in format as 8-1/2 x 11 sheets stapled along one edge, or as professionally complex as printed and bound, soft cover books running well over a hundred pages, especially if student illustrations are included. These latter also offer opportunities for learning about the entire publishing field, discussions with authors (check with your local branch of the Canadian Authors Association), editors, printers, and publishers' representatives.

For student-written short stories, the following outlets are suggested.

(1) Award Stories (Grade 9-12)
- sponsored annually by Canada Permanent Trust
- provincial winners receive $300 first prize, $125 second prize, $75 third prize, and a number of honourable mention certificates
- provincial first prize winners are judged to determine a national winner who receives an additional $700
- provincial firsts are published annually in an anthology available free to all high schools in Canada
- for contest rules, contact the nearest CPT branch, or Canada Permanent Trust, Executive Offices, 320 Bay Street, Toronto

(2) Canadian Short Story Magazine
- contact L. Burke, Editor, Box 263, Lethbridge, Alberta

(3) The Atlantic Magazine Creative Writing Contest
- school fiction, non-fiction and poetry categories
- contact The Atlantic Monthly Co., Boston, Massachusetts, U. S. A., 02116

(4) Access Magazine
- school fiction, non-fiction and poetry
- contact Harry Rensky, editor, Suite 400, 11010 - 142 Street, Edmonton, Alberta

(5) Scholastic Tab Creative Writing Contest
- no information available

(6) Alberta English
- the editor will use student short stories and poems of superior quality from all grades
- contact T. Gee, editor, 5th Floor, Nordic Court, 10014 - 99 Street, Grande Prairie, Alberta

(7) Reader's Digest

HAVE YOU AN AMUSING ANECDOTE—
An Unusual Story?

MATERIAL REMOVED DUE TO COPYRIGHT RESTRICTIONS

(8) Royal Canadian Legion
- annual essay and poetry contest
- offers four theme areas for Junior (1-7), Intermediate (8-9), and Senior (10-12) students
- good cash prizes for First and Second place in each category plus trips to Ottawa for Intermediate and Senior First Prize winners
- contact the Legion branch nearest you for details

(9) Miss Chatlaine Short Story Contest
- no information available.

For student written poetry, the following outlets are suggested:

(1) Project Pandora (Grade 3-12)
- sponsored annually by CCTE and provincial affiliates
- provincial winners (approx. 25 Elem. 25 Jr. Hg., 25 Sr. Hg.) are submitted to the national judges who select the best 100 (approx.) from Canada for publication in Pandora's Box
(NOTE: 1973 Alberta provincial winners were published in an anthology, How Can a Song Be Blue, as well)
- submit Alberta entries (only your students' best) to T. Gee, Chairman, Alberta Pandora, 5th Floor, Nordic Court, 10014 - 99 Street, Grande Prairie, Alberta

(2) CAA Alberta Poetry Contest
- contact June Fritch, Editor, Alberta Poetry Yearbook, 13104 - 136 Avenue, Edmonton, T5L, 4B3, for contest rules

(3) Edmonton Journal
- contact the editor for details about the Journal's creative writing contest

(4) Access Magazine, The Atlantic Monthly, Miss Catelaine, Scholastic-Tab, Alberta English
- see above

(5) The EC Newsletter
- the editor will use superior quality poems from all grades
- contact Mrs. Ruth Parks, Mount Royal College, Department of English, Lincoln Park Campus, 4825 Richard Road S. W., Calgary, T3E 6K6

Footnotes

1. T. Gee, ed., The Beginning, Calgary School Division No. 41, 1968 (out of print). See also T. Gee, "Academic Option: Creative Writing," Alberta English '70, 10:2, Summer, 1970.

2. T. Gee, "A Study of Teacher Awareness of Creativity," M. Ed. Thesis, Department of Curriculum and Instruction, University of Calgary, Alberta, 1970.

3. A. J. Cropley, "Creativity: A New Kind of Intellect?" The Australian Journal of Education, 2:2, June, 1967.

4. J. P. Guilford, "Creativity: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow," The Journal of Creative Behavior, 1:1, January, 1967.

5. A. J. Cropley, Creativity, London: Longmans, Green and Co., Ltd., 1967.

6. E. Paul Torrance, Guiding Creative Talent, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1962.

Academic Option: Creative Writing

TOM GEE

The pages of this journal are open to creative writing by teachers and students. Following are examples of work from a rural high school.

At least one of Jim Paugh's criticisms (see "I Am Deliberately Not Writing Anything For Marks . . . " *Alberta English* '69 Vol. 9, No. 2) of the present school system has been met in the Junior High Schools offering of the academic option, creative writing. Hopefully, students will not now be limited to "two sentences of free expression". However, without a course curriculum, the danger does exist that creative writing may degenerate into just another language course in which the teacher dishes out topics, harangues on style and technique, and red-inks the resulting faulty mechanics.

In an attempt to prevent this, Airdrie Junior High classes in creative writing have, after an initial start with Haiku and limericks, de-emphasized form and emphasized the worth of individual ideas in whatever form the individual wishes to present them. Curiously enough, many students have chosen to continue using conventional verse forms, frequently the more difficult rhymed verse.

The students now feel, after reading selections from anthologies of student writing which are appearing in Alberta, that much of their work has merit, and a project is under way to publish what is, in their opinion, the best of the year's work. The anthology, entitled *A Spoonful of Clouds* after the following poem by a Grade VII boy, will, hopefully, be ready for printing early in May.

CLOUDS

If I had a spoon
Up in the sky
I'd dish out the clouds
That go sliding by.

I'd take them in
And let them cook
And see if they tasted
As good as they look.

John Brigan

Perhaps other teachers faced with a dearth of ideas for their creative writing options may find something of use in what follows. Moreover, this writer is presently groping himself, and would welcome hearing from others who have found effective means of eliciting enthusiastic, imaginative writing from that group of their students who, by spring, have still not taken hold; that 30 percent–you know which–who have not yet discovered that they have more ideas than they have time to write them down.

Tom Gee is currently completing his Master's Degree in English Education at The University of Calgary.

Here are a few ideas that have proven effective in Airdrie Junior High:
1.Short restrictive verse forms including Haiku, Tanka, Cinquain, Epitaphs, and Limericks:

Haiku

Slow green eyes look up,
A small brown mouth opens wide--
A cat's boastful yawn.

--Debbie Fritz 8

It came quite quickly
On padded feet--the chinook,
A friend from heaven.

--Bill Gardner 7

2.Nonsense Verse: The reading of such well known nonsense verse as *The Jabberwocky, The Skippery Boo, The Doze, The Chickamungus,* and others elicited, from most, an enthusiastic response in kind.

The Glan

He scampers around above the ground--
  Flies high into the treetops;
He laughs and cries and tells white lies;
  He feeds on kitchen floor mops.

The Glan is white with purple dots;
  His feet are red and green.
He sleeps under the ground at night,
But in the day he lives in fright:
  Big beetles try to eat him.

There he goes into a rose!
He has big ears and bright green toes;
  He gets smaller as he grows--
  The Glan that no one knows.

--Beth Bushfield 8

At The Scene Of The Wavering Wiliba

Low and beware
Of frickly hair
And eyes of lifeless light;

Of claws that climb
And noses that shine,
Victims of the blight.

It's up above you
It's down below you,
It lingers by your side;

At the scene of the wavering wiliba
It casts an evil pride.

It hoots like a sparrow
And snores like a wren
And colours the quakadoo.

At the scene of the wavering wiliba
It blights the climbing roo.

It pretervokes
The kindly folks
With strands of prickly hair;

It terrifies
The human eyes
With a cold, lifeless stare.

So beware, my son,
Of feet that run
And eyes of lifeless light.

Or someday, my son,
You may become
A victim of the blight.

—Debbie Fritz 8

3. Emotions: A discussion of how we frighten ourselves on lonely roads at night, although it sparked much writing, prompted this young girl to regret the loss, through maturity, of the pleasure of a self-induced scare.

Fear

I remember when I was young and small,
I was afraid to go downstairs without 'mama'.
I'd believe there were monsters, ugly and tall,
That would eat me before I could yell 'mama'.

Now I'm no longer afraid to go down,
For now I am older and I know there is nothing—
In the basement, that is—
Ugly, with long hair;

Now I know there is nothing.

—Elizabeth Malyk 7

4. Social Comment: For the maturer student, social comment has proven itself a motivating source for writing. Reminiscent of Wilfred Owen's "Dulce Et Decorum Est" is the poem from a Grade IX girl.

Why War?

Why is there shooting and killing today?
Why are men praying and dying away?
Why couldn't people put down their guns
To save the lives of young and brave sons?

Brav'ry and valor's the reason why
They have to become a hero or die.
Peace cannot reign where friends are not kept,
Children fear death; we're only young yet.

So if your young son or older one too
Is called on in battle to fight beside you,
Tell him that brav'ry and valor can't beat
The long lasting peace which follows defeat.

—Linda Cox 9

5. Nature: Discussing the Alberta scene and nature in general, philosophically or descriptively, appears to have strong appeal.

An Alberta Scene

I climbed
a hill
and looked out
upon the snowcoated valley
and the smaller
hills
I saw
the snowfall and
heard the wind
blow and walked waist-
deep in the fresh
clean snow
I watched
the pond as it froze
hard in the cold
and followed
the deer over the snowy
hills

—Les Reynolds 9

The Search

The earth, the sky, the moon, the sun;
These things are all for nought.
'Tis beauty, truth, and justice done,
Forever man has sought.

For living man, an endless search,
A stepping-stone is life.
And so the search for heaven, then,
Is but an empty strife.

—Duncan McInnis 9

Dare we compare this poem to Tennyson's "The Higher Pantheism"? Often the opportunity arises for comparing, very favorably, student writing to that of the masters. The effect upon the student is frequently quite miraculous, a light dawns; and upon the teacher most humbling. Compare the style of the next selection to that of Dylan Thomas.

6. Animals: The influence of animals in the lives of Junior High students cannot be denied. From a quiet corner comes the following:

The Storm

The creak of leather, the muffled sound of horse hooves on soft ground, the whistle of unseen gophers at their entrances, the dodging, flying bob-o-whites leading enemies from their nests of young, the occasional snorting of the dappled, chestnut horse, the sudden digging of heels into animal flanks, the leap and tapering off into a steady lope, wind whistling past ears, the feeling of flying with the gods, a loosening of reins and a quickening of pace giving the sensation of being carefree: a double pull of the reins, and the muffled sound of horse hooves ends.

The ground comes rushing up to surround me; the sensation leaves, leaves me in a noisy, bustling world. A touch of rein on the horse's neck, he wheels and I try to outrace the smothering of civilization. The clouds pour rain on me; the lightning and thunder crash, revealing my fight with reality. On I race at breakneck speed, hearing nothing but the open heavens.

—Gayle Esslinger 9

What experiences and emotions emerge for the student from behind such poems as this and the following?

The Watchdog

He was a big dog
  with a shaggy coat
scarred from many fights.
  In one he had lost an eye.

He was old and tired.
  The sight was going
from the one eye he had.
  His strength had withered away.

Once the most feared dog in the neighbourhood,
  now he was slow and soon to die.
He sat in the room on warm days
  and played with the children.

He is dead and will bark no more
    at some frightened stranger at the door
or play with the neighbour's children
    in the warm summer sun.

—Les Reynolds 9

Fortunately, teachers of creative writing do not have to "follow a curriculum which was devised in blindness." We can devise our own! Let us be "the individuals who do . . . live according to the truth they know." Let's stop talking, forget the mechanics, lose our red pens and join the kids, if only for one period a week, in an attempt to create from within rather than recreate from without.

Three Student Stories

The Grey Stone

by KATHY OIEN,

Grade XI, Cochrane High School

"Oh, isn't this a pretty one?" Teeny crooned to herself as she cradled the newly broken pebble in her chubby little hand.

She scrabbled about the field on her hands and knees, intent in her search for more unusual or pretty stones to add to her somewhat meager collection. She spied a small cream-colored stone in the shadow of a clump of tough grass. It was very smooth and had brown freckles on it. She dug it out of the ground and wiped the cold, wet earth off its underside with the palm of her left hand, carefully wiping the hand then on the seat of her yellow bloomers.

That didn't matter. She looked rather like a pear today in this silly sunsuit, and the dirty bottom was her small act of defiance. Mama thought the sunsuit was "cute"; Teeny felt foolish in it. Grown-ups were funny things; everything was so complicated with them ...

Directing her attention again to her newly-won prize, she jiggled the stone in her fist, savoring its unknown delights before setting it in the carefully chosen spot. She picked up the rock that was as big as her foot – the breaking rock – and with a sharp movement – bang! The freckled stone lay split in half.

Disappointment tugged at her former elation. It was only a plain brown rock inside. Teeny heaved a sign and started her search again. You never knew what you would find inside the rocks. Sometimes, if you looked at it just right, closing one eye and squinting a little, the inside of a rock could be a glittering castle of crystal, or a whole shimmering world. Sometimes it was like holding a miniature rainbow in your hand. But the best part was probably the waiting and wondering, the delicious expectation of what could be inside a plain pebble.

It was turning out to be a delightful day. Auntie Bea had even played marbles with her when Mama had gone out to shop this morning. How Teeny loved Auntie Bea! She was part of her world; she was familiarity, security, a piece of realness to hold on to when things weren't balanced right, when being a big girl of five got to be too much. Teeny need only run to Auntie Bea, with her toothless grin, her wispy grey hair, and the smell of mothballs clinging to her shapeless form, to climb into her ample lap, to let all the wrinkles in her world smooth themselves out.

Mama had come home from shopping with her "something special" smile on. "Something special for Teeny today," she had whispered with fun in her eyes.

"What is it, Mama?" Teeny had asked, hopping from one foot to the other in a painful ecstasy of anticipation. Then Mama had taken them from behind her back – the shoes! Oh, wonderful, perfect, little red canvas shoes with rubber toes! Teeny had squealed in untold joy. She could hardly have them on fast enough. When she did, the stiff white laces tied in pompous bows, she could barely contain her joy. It spilled out all over making everything

sparkle like frost on autumn early mornings.

So here she sat, across the street from her house, in the field that stretched as far as to where the sky ended in the horizon. Somewhere, across there, Teeny reflected, lived the crazy boy, in an old shack among the rocks. At least, that's what Lorretta Lars said. Lorretta Lars took real ballet lessons, and was six, and thus, naturally, assumed authority on a wide variety of subjects, the crazy boy being one. "He drools and ev'rything," she had whispered gleefully. "An' he'll do terrible things to ya, my big brother says, if he catches ya."

Well, Teeny certainly had no intentions of being caught by him. She shuddered and then glanced fondly at her red shoes which she had

carefully removed and set aside so as not to scuff up the rubber toes. She sat back on her bloomers, watching with satisfied laziness an ant frantically make its way up a blade of grass. I wonder what he'll do when he gets to the top of the ...?

Teeny squeezed her eyes shut tightly and saw green fireworks against a dull red background. Perhaps if she studied this darkness for long enough, the shadow looming above her would go away. But it didn't. She opened her eyes, and they were confronted with two large, bare, dirty feet no more than three feet away from her. And she was terrified – more afraid than she'd ever been in her life.

The worst part of this kind of fright was that she didn't know why she was afraid. She had been afraid when the big dog had attacked her; but all the dog had done was bite her; this was a more permanent kind of fear. She looked up, up, up into the face of the idiot before her, and she knew he wouldn't hurt her. But he could do worse, he could damage her jigsaw world of safety. She should run. She wanted to run as she studied the ugly, bulging eyes, the protruding lower lip and the saliva making its way down the corners of his mouth to the dingy checked shirt. If she didn't run then she'd have changed; things wouldn't fit right any more because, just like the other kids, she should have run to a safe distance and then pelted him with rocks with a courage fed by cruelty. What a funny head he had, shaped just like the huge vase at home in the front room. She giggled.

He, in turn, gurgled with satisfaction and waved his arms and gestured to her precious rock pile. He obviously wanted to help find pretty stones. He walked a few feet away, pried a stone loose from the ground and brought it to her, motioning to her breaking stone.

She took the stone and looked at it. Oh, but it was just an ugly, rough grey rock that was probably ugly, rough and grey inside as well. But, how could she explain that to him? He wouldn't know the difference anyway. So she set it down and hit it with her breaking stone.

"Ouch! It's so hard!" Not a crack in the ugly thing. The tuft of white hair that Mama always snatched up into a white bow above her forehead danced over her nose as she struck the stone with rhythmic concentration. A chip finally flew off the rock, and what Teeny saw made her gasp in wonder and delight. For underneath the rough, ugly exterior, the bluest of deep blues shimmered and winked silvery at her when the sunlight tickled it.

"Here, you do it the rest of the way. I can't ..." The fear which had been neglected in her absorption with the rock came surging forward again, turning her world upside down. This crazy boy crouching beside her, fascination growing on his ugly, foolish face, wasn't a part of what she wanted to be real. None of this was. Teeny ran.

She stopped though, fifteen feet away, long enough to hurl the grey rock which was still clutched in her hand. Then she was off again, to home, to comfort, to safety, so she didn't hear the boy cry out in pain and puzzlement as the

rock struck.

When she was safely inside, she watched through the picture window the crouched figure across the street slowly stand, holding something red to his breast. A wild thought stung her as he trudged across the field to where it met the sky — her red shoes! She cried herself to sleep in the rocking chair before the fire that evening.

Teeny awoke in her own bed in the fuzzy greyness of dawn. She crawled out of bed and went to the front room to stare out the big picture window. She couldn't tell where the field and sky met now; they were both merged into one grey blur. Everything was grey except ...

Her heart skipped three beats in hope, joy, fear. Everything was grey except for a pair of canvas shoes with rubber toes, canvas shoes which were exuberantly red. She opened the front door and scooped up the shoes in one ecstatic movement. But something had fallen out of the right shoe, something that had an ugly grey outside, and an inside stolen from a starry night. She thought she knew where the other half of the stone was.

She slept peacefully late into the morning, with her red shoes under her bed, and her grey stone under her pillow. ■

Reflections

by CARYN BARR,
Grade X, Cochrane High School

She strode in at her habitually slow, determined pace, pausing occasionally to ponder over the mud-spattered tiles or the incessant drip of water falling reluctantly from the lab's faucet. Automatically, she took off her tawny jacket. She replaced it with a blue flowered housecoat which hung loosely below the edge of her tailored grey tweed skirt and clung noticeably to her clothing. Her long slender legs were marred by the seams which ran conspicuously down the back of her nylons and into her scuffed brown loafers. The baggy maroon sweater, which covered a striped blouse, clashed with her housecoat. In a way, it became her. The housecoat replaced the starched white lab coat which hung untouched in the closet. She had seemed to tower above the students and other teachers, not because of her height, for in spite of her long legs, her body had assumed a hunched position over the years, giving her the carriage of an old woman — it was their respect which admitted her domination.

She stared intently at the empty classroom which smelled of used chemicals and echoed with the laughter of the girls and boys who had once been there. She shivered in the empty, cold stillness. Her wrinkled old hands reached unconsciously for the double string of turquoise beads which were draped unfashionably around her neck. She fiddled absently with the shiny baubles, twisting and untwisting them around her long fingers.

Slowly she opened the scratched, charred drawer, hearing the familiar squeaks and groans as it was wrested from its long hibernation. Inside lay little odds and ends of her teaching career and, as she stared at a lonely black yo-yo, she longed to relive it again.

"The ions in an electrolyte solution can arise in two major ways. They may already be prese ..." The sound of wood dropping on a concrete floor echoed throughout the room. Miss Wiggins peered over the desk just in time to see a yo-yo wobble down the aisle, stagger and duck behind an Adidas runner. She looked up, her face reddening in anger at the guilty boy who had dared to play in her class. Seated near the back, he was a big boy who now wiggled uncomfortably in his seat. His innocent demeanor was betrayed by the downcast eyes and the

nonsensical scribbling pouring from his pen. His name was Georgie Wilson.

"Come here please, Georgie," Miss Wiggins said in a voice which defied defiance. The class was silent, dreading what was to come. Georgie shuffled slowly up to the front, paused to retrieve his yo-yo, and stood cowering before the magistrate. The trial began.

"What is the purpose," Miss Wiggins started "of this ignorant and childish behavior?"

The folds of fat dripped off his neck and jiggled as his jaw ached to answer. "I don't know, ma'm." It came, and he waited for the thunderous reply.

"I will have you in every day for one week to complete one hundred math questions." Miss Wiggins said this in a low voice, shaking with anger. The boy turned to leave, his sentence having been delivered. "Georgie." Reluctantly he gave up his treasured yo-yo and waddled back to his seat.

Miss Wiggins' voice continued, "... present in the pure compound as in ionic solids ..."

She smiled and her emerald eyes glittered as she reflected on the unfortunate incident. There were old, unused laugh lines around her eyes and her face flushed with color accenting the silver in her shortly cropped hair, hair the color of cloud filling up for a rain. The dark red lips parted reluctantly into a smile as if they had been together too long and the parting was hard.

She slipped back into reality, grabbed a tooth-marred Bic pen and closed the drawer which eased thankfully back into place. On a piece of lined paper, she began to write: "Dear Sirs ..." The pen stopped writing and her fingers clutched in their position, waiting. (Sun peeking through grey clouds/Falling with the rain /Let me try again.)

A single large tear rolled slowly down her right cheek and dove off her chin onto the paper titled "Dear Sirs". Hurriedly she wiped it off and watched as the center of one of the thirty-nine blue lines running horizontally along the paper turned into a blue smudge. (Georgie Porgie, puddin' 'n pie/Kissed the girls and made them cry.)

Her emerald eyes clouded into a murky green, damp with the salty water of an ocean hidden behind them. She stared longingly at the six rows of blue desks. Their tops were healing slowly from pen-point wounds and bore battle scars from long ago. They stood in a silence which rang out the laughter and guarded whispers of students who had once sat there.

The door swung open and Miss Wiggins strode in, stopping abruptly at the sight of purple and green streamers dripping from the ceiling; a chorus of "Surprise!" came from the thirty smiling faces waiting at their desks. Startled, she removed her tawny jacket and took her place at the front of the room. Her desk was a blur of purple and green with a huge white sign on it saying "Miss Wiggins". She smiled at the class and wondered how she was going to get through the scheduled lesson on molecules.

Her eyes roamed the room and caught sight of the cakes, ice cream, and candies at the back set out under a red banner with "Farewell" printed on it. She looked at their eager, expectant faces and said, "I am very pleased with your thoughtfulness and I believe that perhaps today's lesson can wait for a while." This speech resulted in a mad stampede of hungry children towards the back of the room and the food. She watched as one boy, Georgie Wilson,

devoured his share of the food and proceeded to eat that of others. Inwardly, Miss Wiggins smiled.

The remaining part of the period was filled with games and songs. The room reverberated with the laughter bubbling incessantly from the children. Miss Wiggins was thinking of what the principal would say if he were to see her room now. The party ended with all the children singing an off-key "For She's A Jolly Good Fellow" and their murmured wishes of good luck. The bell for lunch rang and they rushed out of the room, leaving the mess behind.

Miss Wiggins sat down and sighed. She felt a presence in the room and looked up to see Georgie Wilson seated in his place near the back. Slowly, mischieviously, he waddled up to her, his pudgy, gooey fingers clutching a black object. The sound of corduroy pant legs rubbing against each other as he walked pierced the silence of the room. He stood before her, held out his hand and opened it. Inside lay the scarred, little black yo-yo which Miss Wiggins had returned to him only two weeks ago.

"Yes?" Miss Wiggins inquired in a voice which betrayed the uneasy curiosity which she felt.

Georgie's fat, round face broke into a grin showing the two dimples which punctuated his cheeks. He was sure of himself. "I want you to have this, ma'm, in remembrance of ... me," he said. The grin was still there.

Rigidly, Miss Wiggins reached out for the yo-yo. Her fingers clutched it and brought it back. "Thank you, Georgie. Is that all?" She was uncomfortably hot and her nose shone. The grin was still there, but Miss Wiggins could find nothing humorous. Uncertainly she smiled back at him. Georgie reached up to her and, balancing on his tip-toes, gave her a wet kiss on the right cheek, leaving her face stained and sticky from the chocolate cakes and candies on his.

He left her there and shuffled out the door into the empty hallway. Miss Wiggins sat alone and listened to the fading sound of corduroy pant legs rubbing against each other as he walked away. The tears rolled freely down her cheeks for just a minute before she went to wash her face.

She picked up her Bic pen and started again.

Dear Sirs,

As I have now reached sixty-five years of age, I must retire as a teacher in Saint Joseph Junior High School. I have found my job satisfactory.

Sincerely yours,
Miss Ada Wiggins

She found an envelope, addressed it and placed the letter inside. Her tongue passed quickly over the flap and she sealed it. She grabbed her tawny jacket, walked to the door and placed her hand on the cold silver knob. She took a last look at her classroom and turned the knob. The door opened and she stepped out, closing it and the room behind her. As she turned towards the office, her hand reached up and briefly touched her right cheek.

■

Willie

by ROYCE BOGART,

Grade XII, Cochrane High School

The sun was just rising over the eastern hills as young Willie Logan slipped on his faded overalls and rose to meet the new day. He padded barefoot to the screen door and gazed at the blazing horizon. "Red sky in the morning ...", he thought. Willie closed the door behind

him as quietly as its squeaky hinges would allow. After all, he didn't want to awaken his mother. She had enough to worry about with Pa gone on a business trip to England. He'd been gone for a month now, but he'd be home in another two weeks.

Willie had missed his Dad, but he'd also enjoyed his new role as man of the house. He was expected to do all the chores his Dad used to do, such as feeding the chickens and gathering the eggs. He picked up a handful of feed and scattered it around the pen. The chickens pecked at his bare feet as he made his way to the coop to check for eggs for breakfast.

At breakfast, his mother talked enthusiastically about his father's trip home. His father would be starting home tomorrow, the sixth of the month, by ocean liner. He would be sailing for a week and dock in New York. From there, he would come home by train.

It was right after breakfast that Willie began to feel strange. His eyelids felt heavy and he had trouble keeping his balance. His stomach was tied in a knot and his temples throbbed. His mind was foggy but he envisioned a large bird sailing in the sky – an albatross.

His mother sent him to bed thinking he had a touch of the 'flu. She couldn't understand it when he asked her for some paints and paper. He had never been much interested in painting before, but she complied with his request to humor him.

The next morning she entered the room to find him hunched over the paper: apparently he

had been painting all night. She was shocked and amazed when she looked over his shoulder at his painting. It was an astonishingly realistic impression of a man and a boy adrift on a raft. The boy was sprawled in the man's lap as thunderous waves beat down upon them. The man had a strange hopelessness in his eyes as he searched the horizon. It was then that she realized the man's face was strangely familiar. It was ... her husband!

"Mom," Willie asked, "what's the name of the ship Pa's sailing on?"

"The Lusitania," she replied. "Why?" ■

(Editor's note: These three stories are indicative of the quality of student work to appear in *A Nickel's Worth of Wishing*, edited by Tom Gee and published by the English Council. Inquiries about this anthology may be addressed to Mr. Gee in care of this journal.)